a triangle is the strongest shape by BeggarWhoRides

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Summary:

It starts when everything is over.

Or, after fighting off demodogs, Steve still has a battle to fight, and Steve and Nancy and Jonathan still need to figure out each other.

a triangle is the strongest shape

Author's Note:

> Warnings for: descriptions of injuries and the aftermath of violence, seizures.
>
> It's another "hey remember how head injuries are dangerous? apparently the stranger things writers didn't but we do!" mixed with some ot3 getting together.

It starts when everything is over.

They're in the Byers house, Will's drawings being trampled and Will himself finally sleeping, finally peacefully, and Nancy is halfway past panic because Mike and the kids aren't there and Billy Hargrove is unconscious on the floor when there's the sound of a car pulling up.

"You stay with Will," Jonathan says to his mother. "Nancy--"

"I'm coming," Nancy snaps, and then Jonathan's trying to keep up with her on the way to the door.

"Be careful--"

"I know, Jonathan," she hisses back, the two of them facing the door, shoulder to shoulder. Somehow this seems to happen over and over again--her and Jonathan, shoulders touching, at the end of the world.

The door creaks open, slow and steady. The edge of a baseball bat, nails sticking out, creeps around the edge of the doorway.

"Steve?" And that always happens too, doesn't it? The end of the world, and Steve appears, just in time.

The door swings open fully after Nancy's shout, and suddenly there's a small stampede of children spilling into the house.

"Where's Will?"

“Is Will okay?”

“Wait, shit, we forgot about Billy--”

“Nancy!” and then Mike is wrapped around Nancy’s waist, holding on like he’ll never let go. It’s automatic, the way Nancy’s knees give out, the way she holds him back, fiercely.

“Mike! Where the hell were you?”

“We needed to make a distraction--to give El more time--is Will here? Is he okay?”

“He’s okay, he’s sleeping, don’t you ever do that again, you understand? Ever again.”

“Is El back?”

“Not yet.” She’s still clutching him tightly, but feels his shoulders slump at that. “Hey, why don’t you go see Will, okay? I’ll call you the minute she shows up.”

Mike nods and she lets him go, watching him disappear into the hallways of the house. The others follow just as quickly, even that redheaded girl she can’t quite remember the name of.

“Harrington?” Jonathan asks, choked, and Nancy turns around.

He’s still holding the bat, but it’s dragging along the ground, and he looks like *hell.* Nancy can’t even tell how he can see, his eyes are that swollen, and every spot on his face is purple or bleeding--every spot, that is, except for the rainbow bandaids hanging half-off his face, and *what the actual hell.*

And then he starts to fall.

Nancy stands, but Jonathan gets there first. *God,* Nancy’s seen some horrors tonight, but she doesn’t want to see this ever again, Steve going suddenly boneless and ashen beneath his bruises, limp in Jonathan’s arms. Jonathan lowers him to the ground gently, but he looks up at Nancy and his eyes are blown wide with terror.

“Mom! *Mom!”*

“Jonathan?” Joyce rushes in, and the blood rushes from her face. “What happened?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know--”

“I do.” Dustin’s standing in the doorway, eyes wide and fixed on Steve. “But he was fine--he was *fine,* I swear.”

“Dustin, slow down.” Nancy goes over to him while Joyce kneels next to Jonathan, hands fluttering over Steve. “What happened?”

“It was Billy.” The other kids had followed, and suddenly four terrified faces are staring past her to Steve. It’s the redhaired girl who speaks up, half-hidden behind Lucas. “He was gonna kill me.”

“And me,” Lucas adds.

“All of us,” Dustin finishes. “And Steve beat him up! Or tried to--Max was the one who stopped him really, but Steve stepped in. And then he led us through the tunnels--”

“Tunnels?”

“Maybe we work that part out later?” Jonathan calls from where’s knelt on the floor. “What did Billy do, exactly?”

“He hit him. A lot.”

“Okay.” Nancy refocuses on the girl, who must be Max. “In the face?”

“Mostly.”

“He got him in the head too,” Dustin adds. “With a plate.”

“It shattered,” Mike chimes in. “All over. And that was when Steve went down, and Billy was just *whaling* on him, over and over, he didn’t stop until Max hit him with that syringe--”

“Nancy!” Jonathan shouts. On the floor, Steve’s making some sort of choking noise, body jerking, and it’s automatic, the way Nancy runs

to him.

“Get him on his side,” Joyce says. Jonathan and Nancy work together to get him turned, his head on Jonathan’s lap while Nancy rubs his back and Steve empties his stomach onto the floor.

“Steve?” Nancy calls, but he just moans and coughs.

“I’ll grab some rags,” Joyce murmurs, gently squeezing Steve’s arm before rushing off. Steve jerks like he’s trying to get up, but Jonathan lays a hand on his face before Nancy can do a thing.

“Hey, easy, shh,” he murmurs, in a voice Nancy’s never heard before, gentle and soft. “It’s alright. You’re alright, Steve.” He seems to find an uninjured patch on the side of Steve’s head and runs his hand along it, stroking his hair down. “Just lie still, yeah? We’ll get you patched up.”

“You’re fine, Steve,” Nancy chimes in. “Easy.”

“Help me move him,” Joyce says, and they both startle. Jonathan snatches his hand away. “We’ll get him into your bedroom, Jonathan.”

“I don’t think he’s walking anywhere, Mom.”

“We can’t leave him in his own sick. Nancy, can you grab a sheet--”

The rumble of a car parking comes from outside, and they all freeze.

“El,” Mike whispers, and launches himself over Steve and out the door before they can do a thing.

“I’ll get Hop, he’ll be able to help,” Joyce promises, before following. The rest of the kids are still huddled like frightened ducklings, all big eyes and shaking hands.

“It’ll be fine,” Jonathan says, with a wan smile. “The Chief’ll know what to do, and Steve’ll be fine. You’ll see.”

He doesn’t even sound like he’s convincing himself, but Nancy loves him for the effort.

Beneath her hands, Steve moans and shifts again.

“Aw, Jesus.” They turn to see Chief Hopper standing in the doorway, Eleven sagging against his side. “What happened to this kid?”

“Apparently, the kid unconscious in my kitchen.” Joyce slides around to stand at Steve’s head again. “Can you help us move him?”

“I can--”

“No, you can’t,” Hopper says, cutting off Eleven effectively. “You’ve done enough tonight, kiddo. Let us do the heavy lifting on this one.”

“Come on, El,” Mike says, and Nancy can’t help noticing how willingly Eleven goes from leaning on the Chief to leaning on him. “We can go see Will.”

“Okay.”

Hopper lifts Steve like he weighs nothing, but it makes Nancy’s stomach roll to see Steve’s head loll like that, his arms dangling limp, like a doll. She grabs onto Jonathan’s hand and squeezes, tight. Jonathan squeezes back.

“Should we go to the hospital?”

“Let’s see what we’re dealing with first,” Hopper says gruffly. “Where are we taking him?”

“My room,” Jonathan says. “It’s the second--just past Will’s room.”

“Right.”

They barely get Steve laid down before he starts gagging again, Nancy running for a bin while Hopper and Jonathan get him on his side.

“Is this normal?” Joyce asks, over the noise of Steve heaving into the wastebin.

“Head wounds are nasty.” Hopper waits until Steve’s finished before taking the bin away, kneeling to meet his gaze. “Hey. Hey, kid! Look

at me, alright? There ya go, good kid."

Steve doesn't look like he's quite seeing the Chief, but he's looking in the right direction at least, which is a start.

"Can you tell me your name?"

"Steve."

"All of it?"

"Stev'n Daniel 'arringt'n."

"What year is it?"

"1984."

"And where do you live?"

"'Awkins."

"That's right. Good job." Hopper's voice is warm and genuine as he pats Steve's knee.

"The kids," and Steve seems to startle, trying to lurch forward. "Where--"

"They're safe, they're fine, just in the other room."

"Oh." All the fight drains out of him at that. "C'n I sleep now?"

"For a bit." Steve starts to fall back before Hopper catches him by the shoulder, lowering him down rather more gently. "We'll have to wake you in a bit, though."

"'Kay," Steve mumbles back, though he doesn't really seem to have heard what Hopper said.

"Is he alright?" Nancy demands.

"Well, he's not good," Hopper replies, helping to swing Steve's legs into the bed. "Definite concussion, but at least he's aware of who he is and what's happened. We'll have to wake him every couple of

hours to make sure he isn't getting worse."

"I can do that," Jonathan volunteers easily. "Mom, you've got to look after Will, and someone's got to take care of Billy."

"I'll help," Nancy offers. "We can sleep and wake him in shifts."

Hopper nods, and Joyce gives Jonathan a squeeze on his arm before they both leave, the door shutting behind them.

On the bed, Steve groans.

"He will be alright, won't he?"

"Of course." Jonathan reaches out, pulling Nancy close and resting her chin on her head. "He has to be."

"Steve," Nancy calls, shaking his shoulder. Jonathan sits up blearily from where he'd been dozing against the wall. "Steve, come on. You've got to wake up."

"Nancy?" Steve slurs, squinting. "Not Mike?"

"Now why would it be Mike?" she asks, teasing to hide her relief at the fact he could recognize her. "What's your name?"

"Steve."

"All of it."

"Steven Daniel 'arrington."

"And the year?"

"1984." Steve blinks, glancing around. "Why's it smell like Byers?"

"Oh, um." Nancy glances at Jonathan and back. "You're in Jonathan's bed."

"Oh." Steve blinks again. "Why isn't he in the bed?"

“Because you’re in it.”

“Oh.” Steve looks like he’s fading out again, but then grabs at Nancy’s hand. “You’ll be cold.”

“What?”

“It’s late, you’ll be cold. Bed.” He tugs awkwardly at Nancy until she acquiesces, going to sit on the side of the bed.

“Steve…”

“It’s fine, Nancy,” Jonathan said, with an awkward smile. “He’s...I mean, he’s sick.”

“Jonathan?” Steve’s head flopped to the side, searching. “You come too. Bed.”

“No--” Jonathan goes bright red, up to the tips of his ears. “It--it’s fine, Steve.”

“‘S your bed.”

“You can’t argue with that,” Nancy points out, a little half-smile on her face. Steve’s still holding onto one of Nancy’s hands, but the other reaches out toward where he thinks Jonathan is. Jonathan at last makes his awkward way over, patting at Steve’s hand. Steve, having none of that, grabs Jonathan’s hand and pulls.

“Alright, Steve. We’re both here. Can you sleep now?”

“You sleep too. C’mon.”

“Oh, Steve--” Nancy starts, glancing up at Jonathan. Jonathan, however, decidedly avoids her gaze, ears still bright red.

“He won’t settle unless we agree, right? And he needs to sleep. So do we, actually.”

“Will we all even fit in your bed?”

Jonathan shrugs, still looking decidedly away. “Only one way to find

out.”

It’s a careful, awkward thing, the two of them laying down and trying desperately not to jostle Steve, and not touch him at the same time. Steve, concussed as he is, doesn’t seem to care at all, nuzzling down into his pillows happily. Jonathan ends up with his back against the wall, Steve in the center, and Nancy, the smallest, hugging the edge of the bed.

“‘S nice,” Steve mumbles into the pillow.

“Oh?” Nancy seems more amused than anything by Steve’s lowered personal filter. “That’s good.”

“I like this. The both of you. Wanted it for a long time.”

Jonathan’s ears go from red to firetruck, and even Nancy goes very still at Steve’s side. Steve, for his part, notices nothing.

“Maybe--maybe we should sleep. For a bit.”

“Yes,” Nancy agreed quickly. “I think that would be best.”

Jonathan had been sure to set an alarm to go off exactly two hours after Nancy woke Steve the first time, but it isn’t that that wakes him. Instead, it’s a steady, insistent nudging at his leg.

“Wha…” He groans as he sits up. “Harrington? What is it?”

Steve’s eyes are open, but he’s not looking at Jonathan--he’s not looking at anything at all, and that’s when ice settles in Jonathan’s gut.

“Steve?”

“What’s going on?” Nancy asks, sitting up, half a moment before Steve’s whole body shudders and he starts to twist in a way people should never twist. “Oh my *god--”*

“Get Hopper,” Jonathan says, sitting up and trying to stay out of the way of Steve’s flailing limbs. “Nancy, get Hopper, *now!”*

Nancy’s off the bed and out the door, and Jonathan’s just trying to keep Steve on the bed at all. He’s making an awful choking noise, whole body jerking, and Jonathan puts his hands on either side of Steve’s face, trying to look into Steve’s unseeing eyes, trying to be of any use at all.

Hopper bursts in, Joyce and a pile of kids at his heels, but it’s only him and Nancy who dare to cross the threshold--everyone else seems frozen at the site.

“On his side,” Hopper barks, and Jonathan hurries to help, narrowly avoiding one of Steve’s arms.

“What’s happening?” one of the kids--Dustin, maybe?--wails from the doorway, but none of them answer, just trying to keep Steve from injuring himself any further.

“Joyce, call the hospital. Tell them to be ready for a kid with head trauma who’s started seizing. Do it now!”

“I pulled the phone out of the wall,” Nancy says numbly. “It won’t work.”

Hopper curses, low and furious, before ordering Jonathan off the bed with a sharp gesture. He bundles Steve up in the sheets, jerking limbs and all, pressing him close to his chest as he stands. “Joyce, with me. We’re driving him there ourselves.”

“I’m coming too.”

“No, you aren’t.” Dustin’s face, mutinous and tear-streaked as it is, does nothing to sway the Chief as he hustles from the room.

“Jonathan, watch the kids,” Joyce calls, and then there’s the sound of slamming doors and police sirens, followed by a horrible silence and an empty space in the bed where Steve used to be.

“Is Steve gonna be okay?”

Jonathan smiles at his little brother, and then at his brother's friends, gently ushering them out of the room.

"How about I make you all some hot chocolate, and we'll stay up until Mom gets back with news, okay?"

"What is 'hot chocolate'?"

"Oh, you'll like it, El, I promise…"

When Jonathan gets back into the room, Nancy is huddled in the corner, her forehead on her knees.

"Oh--" She starts when he enters, going to stand, but he just sinks down next to her, one hand on her knee. After a moment, she puts her hand on top of his.

"You okay?"

"Better than Steve." Nancy sniffs, wiping at her eyes. "God, he ran off protecting the kids, and got himself beat halfway to--halfway to *dead,* while we just--"

"We couldn't have known. They were supposed to be safe here, you know that."

"But we just *left him."*

Jonathan's silent for a long moment. "You still love him."

"No," Nancy objects immediately. "No, no, Jonathan, I--"

"I-it's okay," Jonathan says, but he's not looking at her. "I get it. It's not like there's anything *not* to love about him."

"Jonathan, no, it's not--" Nancy freezes, sitting up to stare at him. "You like him too."

"What? No, no--"

“You do. Your face when he insisted you lie down with us--you like him! You totally do!”

“It--it’s not like I don’t like *you,* Nancy!”

“Well,” Nancy said slowly, “Maybe my liking Steve doesn’t mean I don’t like you, either.”

“But what Murray said--”

“Well, what does Murray know, anyway?” *We like Steve, but we don’t* ***love*** *Steve,* he’d said, and maybe he was right about her and Jonathan, but maybe he was wrong about her and Steve. Or maybe not wrong about her and Steve, but not right either. She’d been so unhappy while she was with Steve, and it would’ve made sense for him to have been the reason but--she’d never hated Steve, but she’d hated herself so much while she and Steve had been together, swollen with guilt over Barb and bitter with lying to everyone about it. She hadn’t felt she deserved any good, and so she’d sabotaged whatever good she’d had--and so she hadn’t waited more than a month for Jonathan, and then she’d thrown all of Steve’s kindness in his face, because he and Jonathan were the brightest good things in her life.

“Can it even work? Three people, together?”

“Mom’s always suspected that Will--well, she’s always said it doesn’t matter what he does, or who he does it with, as long as he’s happy. That’s what we’ve always said and believed, and it’d be hypocritical if I didn’t say that about us.”

“I’m not awful for wanting more than you?”

“Only if I’m awful for wanting the same. But Will almost--tonight, he--” His voice breaks, and Nancy holds him tighter, the both of them trembling with what had happened only a few hours before. “So does it even matter? Whether people will think we’re good or awful, when we’ve all come so close to losing everything?”

“I don’t know,” Nancy whispered, and then: “But what if it doesn’t matter, any of it? What if Steve--” Her voice cracks, but Jonathan

holds onto her tighter, and she knows he understands. “What if we’ve lost our chance, before we really had it at all?”

“He’ll be alright.” Nancy rests her head on his shoulder, and Jonathan wraps his arm around her. She’s shaking, and so is he, but he keeps talking anyway--even if neither of them quite believe him. “He’ll be alright.”

Steve wakes up two days after surgery for a bleed on his brain.

Nancy and Jonathan visit him two days after that.

He still looks awful, somehow worse against the white of the hospital room, with a bandage around his head and IV tubing in the back of his hand, all the bruises fading to sickly yellows and greens. Nancy and Jonathan enter side by side, hands holding tight.

Steve looks up at them and blinks. “Who are you?”

Nancy freezes. At her side, Jonathan stutters.

Steve breaks into a grin. “Oh man, you should’ve seen your faces!”

“You’re an *idiot,* Steve Harrington,” Nancy laughs, and Steve’s eyes light up with delight, only to move to Jonathan and for that delight to stutter out. That, more than anything, makes Jonathan sure of what they’re about to do--it’s cruel, seeing Steve think he’s not allowed to be happy.

“We brought you some stuff,” he says, to fill the silence in the room. “It looks like the kids have been through, though.”

“Oh, yeah.” Steve grins, which looks painful among the bruises, but his expression is nothing but fond. “Those dipshits have decided to run their campaigns out of here until I get discharged. It looks like a nerd threw up all over the room.”

“Mike mentioned something like that.” Nancy recognizes several of the figurines from her basement. “I’m sorry we haven’t stopped by

sooner--"

"No, no, I get it." Steve waves it off before she can finish her sentence. "You mentioned presents?"

Nancy scoffs, but reaches into her pocket anyway, dropping a small box on Steve's beside table. "Nails. Extra long. For upgrading your monster-fighting bat."

"Hey, thanks, Nance." Steve picks up the the box of nails, passing it from hand to hand. "Hopefully we won't need these, but you know."

"And I, uh, I brought you this." Jonathan fumbles in his pocket for a moment before pulling out a tape. "It's a mixtape. Well, it's not, actually--I was gonna make you a mixtape, but then I wasn't sure if you'd want to listen to music, because of your head--if it would make any headaches worse--and I really didn't know what kind of music you liked, anyway, and I didn't have a chance to ask you, so it's--it's like an I.O.U., I guess. A promise for later."

"A promise for later," Steve repeats, reaching out to take the tape. "I like the sound of that."

Jonathan stuffs his hands back in his pockets as soon as Steve takes the tape, but Steve lingers over the blank tape for a moment longer.

"A box of nails and a blank mixtape. These are the best get-well gifts I've ever gotten." His words are teasing, but there's nothing but sincerity in his eyes.

"Well, it's not all we've got for you." Nancy glances back at Jonathan before stepping forward to perch on the edge of Steve's bed. She reaches for his hand but he pulls it away, glancing between Nancy and Jonathan like they're playing a practical joke.

"It's okay, Steve," Jonathan calls from where he is, still a few steps away. "Nancy and I were talking about this."

"Talking about what, exactly?"

"Steve, do you still love me?"

Steve almost physically flinches from the question, eyes darting to Jonathan.

“Because I’m with Jonathan, Steve. But I want to be with you too.”

“I don’t understand.”

“We don’t either, really.” Both Steve and Nancy look up, and Jonathan swallows before moving forward, slow like he’s trying not to spook a frightened animal. He’s careful to give Steve every chance to tell him to piss off, but he doesn’t, and eventually Jonathan’s sitting on Steve’s other side, his hands barely an inch from Steve’s own. He reaches his other hand across Steve’s lap, to hold Nancy’s hand. “But we’ve all almost died a bunch of times, and things like what’s normal and what’s abnormal just--don’t really matter anymore.”

“We know what we want,” Nancy says, finally. “And we wondering if you might want it too.”

“What--like you’re dating both of us?” Steve asks, still looking mostly at Nancy. “Or like I’m dating both of you?”

“Both, maybe?” Nancy gives an uncharacteristic nervous laugh, looking over at Jonathan. “Look, this--this is weird, and new, and somehow scarier than fighting off the demodogs--” and they all grin at that. “And none of us get it, at all. But what we were wondering…” She reaches for Steve’s hand, and this time he doesn’t pull away. On his other side, Jonathan reaches for Steve’s hand with a little more caution, but Steve doesn’t pull back from him either.

“We were wondering if you wanted to figure it out with us.”

It’s a long moment before Steve smiles, but when he does it’s like the dawn breaking, bruises and all. Jonathan and Nancy beam back, clutching at Steve’s hands and to each other.

“I do,” Steve says. “I really, really do.”

Everyone is safe now--everything is over.

And everything is just beginning.

Author's Note:

Thank you so much for reading! It's my first time writing for Stranger Things, and my first time writing polyamory in general, so I apologize for any ooc-ness or odd bits. Comments and criticism are always quite welcome!

Take care of yourselves lovelies <3